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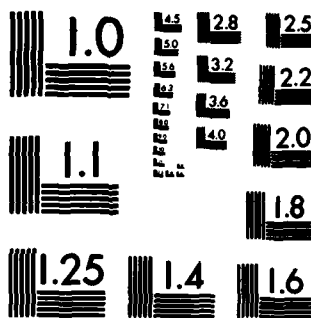UNCLASSIFIED AFOSR-TR-85-0194 AFOSR-82-0022   F/G 20/6   NL

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
UNCLASSIFIED			

2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY	3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT
	Approved for public release; distribution
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE	unlimited.

4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)
	AFOSR-TR- 85-0194

6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION	6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION
University of Pennsylvania		Air Force Office of Scientific Research

6c. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)	7b. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)
Dept of Electrical Engineering Philadelphia PA 19104	Directorate of Mathematical & Information Sciences, Bolling AFB DC 20332-6448

8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (If applicable)	9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
AFOSR	NM	AFOSR-82-0022

8c. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)	10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NOS.			
	PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.	TASK NO.	WORK UNIT NO.
Bolling AFB DC 20332-6448	61102F	2304	A5	

11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)
NONLINEAR EDGE-PRESERVING FILTERING TECHNIQUES FOR IMAGE ENHANCEMENT

12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)
Y.H. Lee and S.A. Kassam

13a. TYPE OF REPORT	13b. TIME COVERED	14. DATE OF REPORT (Yr., Mo., Day)	15. PAGE COUNT
Reprint	FROM _____ TO _____	June 1984	4

16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION
Presented at the 27th Midwest Symposium on Circuits and Systems, June 1984; to be published in the Proceedings of the Symposium.

17.	COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)
FIELD	GROUP	SUB. GR.	Edge-preserving filters; nonlinear filters; selective averaging; image enhancement.

19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)

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20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT	21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION
UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED ☒ SAME AS RPT. ☐ DTIC USERS ☐	UNCLASSIFIED

22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL	22b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include Area Code)	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL
MAJ Brian W. Woodruff	(202) 767- 5027	NM

AD-A151 539

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NONLINEAR EDGE PRESERVING FILTERING TECHNIQUES FOR IMAGE ENHANCEMENT[*]

Yong Hoon Lee and Saleem A. Kassam

Moore School of Electrical Engineering
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104

ABSTRACT

Recently introduced generalizations of the median filter (namely the α-trimmed mean and modified trimmed mean filters) are reviewed and related to a class of nonlinear filters called selective averaging filters, and two new filters are defined. These filters are examined for performance on noise-corrupted images and shown to have good smoothing characteristics without edge smearing.

I. INTRODUCTION

The simple nonlinear action of the median filter allows it to generally preserve edges while suppressing impulsive noise components quite well. Median filtering, however, may fail to provide sufficient smoothing of non-impulsive noise components such as white Gaussian noise. Several new filters have recently been studied as generalizations of the median filter. Specifically, the α-trimmed mean filter (α-TM filter) [1-3] and the modified trimmed mean filter (MTM filter) [3] have been proposed as useful new nonlinear filters. The class of nonlinear filters called selective averaging filters [4], which includes the K-nearest neighbor filter (K-NN filter) [4,5], can be related to these generalized median filters. We will examine this relationship in Section II and from this relationship will be able to define two other new filters, the median K-nearest neighbor filter (MED K-NN filter) and the modified nearest neighbor filter (MNN filter). In Section III we will give results of experiments in which these filters are applied to noisy images.

All of the filters considered in this paper are local image enhancement techniques in which each pixel is replaced by a value obtained through an operation performed on a neighborhood W of the pixel. The size of a window or neighborhood is the total number of pixel locations in it. We will generally be interested in odd window sizes which we will write as $2N+1$ for an integer N. The output $y_{k,\ell}$ of an α-TM filter of window size $2N+1$ at pixel location (k,ℓ) for an input image $\{x_{k,\ell}\}$ is the average value of pixels remaining in the window after the $T = \lfloor \alpha(2N+1)\rfloor$ largest and smallest pixels are discarded, with α being some parameter constrained by $0 \le \alpha \le 0.5$. The MTM filter first determines the sample median $m_{k,\ell}$ of

pixels within the window centered on any pixel location (k,ℓ), and then chooses an interval $[m_{k,\ell}-q, m_{k,\ell}+q]$ using some pre-selected constant q. Within the window, data samples outside this range are discarded and the average value of the rest of the data is used as the output. MTM filtering can be thought of as a modification of α-TM filtering [3]. Note that the number of values used in averaging is not fixed a priori in MTM filtering, while it is fixed as $2(N-T)+1$ in α-TM filtering. The MTM filter is able to reject impulsive noise components because for each output it starts by obtaining the median value inside the corresponding window. Note that the MTM filter also treats its ordered data within a window in a non-symmetric way depending on the data.

The window sizes of α-TM and MTM filters are constrained as in median filtering. If a narrow pulse of the original image, composed of I pixels is to be preserved, then the maximum window size, allowed is $2I-1$ in the noise-free case. To overcome this difficulty a double-window (DW) variation of the MTM filter has been introduced [3]. In the double-window MTM filter (DW MTM filter) windows of size $2N+1$ and $2L+1$, with $L > N$, are centered at (k,ℓ). First the sample median $m_{k,\ell}$ is computed from the small window of size $2N+1$. For some positive number q an interval $[m_{k,\ell}-q, m_{k,\ell}+q]$ is chosen. Then the mean of points lying within the interval $[m_{k,\ell}-q, m_{k,\ell}+q]$ among the samples in the larger window of size $2L+1$ is computed as the output. The condition concerning preservation of a narrow pulse composed of I connected pixels, namely, $2N+1 \le 2I-1$, is a necessary but not sufficient condition in the two-dimensional case (it is sufficient and necessary in one dimension). In general we can say that a narrow pulse composed of I pixels will always be preserved by median filtering of window size $2N+1 \le 2I-1$ if at least $N+1$ pixels of the narrow pulse are included in the window whenever the subject pixel (center of the window) comes from the narrow pulse.

II. RELATIONSHIP OF GENERALIZED MEDIAN FILTERS TO SELECTIVE AVERAGING FILTERS

Selective averaging [4] refers to a class of local image enhancement techniques which are designed specifically to not average across edges, or lines. At each pixel, called the subject pixel, every value in its window is examined.

Then the general idea is that only those pixels coming from the same region (for example, same side of an edge) as the _subject_ pixel are averaged and the rest are discarded. Note that the generalized median filters, especially the α-TM and MTM filters, follow the same general policy except that they average pixel values close to the _median_ pixel. In particular, one selective averaging technique called the K-nearest neighbor filter (K-NN filter) [4,5] will now be shown to be closely related to α-TM and MTM filters.

Two versions of a K-NN filter may be defined. In the first version (K-NN$_1$), in each window the filter averages a fixed number K of values closest to the subject pixel, _including_ the pixel itself, where K is an integer less than or equal to the window size 2N+1. The output is then this averaged value. This K-NN$_1$ filter is similar to the α-TM filter in the sense that it averages a fixed number of selected values inside each window. Thus in non-impulsive noise suppression the K-NN$_1$ and the α-TM filters can be designed to have similar performances (by choosing K = 2(N-T)+1). However, impulsive noise components cannot be suppressed effectively, in general, by averaging the values within a window which are close to the value of the _center_ pixel. This is because the center pixel itself may have been corrupted by an impulsive noise component. Generalized median filters can suppress impulsive noise because they average values close to the _median_. On the other hand, the K-NN$_1$ filter has a non-symmetric data-dependent smoothing property as in MTM filtering. It always averages K consecutive pixel values from amongst the ordered set, but the location of these values in the ordered set is _not_ fixed. Thus the K-NN$_1$ filter can be more effective than the α-TM filter in edge preservation for properly chosen K; for example, when a 3 x 3 symmetric square window is used the K-NN$_1$ filter with K ≤ 6 will preserve a noise-free step edge with a horizontal, vertical or diagonal orientation. In addition, _iterated_ use of the K-NN$_1$ filter can result in impulsive noise suppression, because at each iteration the value of an impulsive component is reduced and non-impulsive components are not influenced by the presence of impulsive components.

In K-NN$_1$ filtering the window size can be chosen more freely because, for a fixed K, different window sizes generally do not result in very different performances as long as they are all reasonably big. We can observe this explicitly in the one-dimensional case, in which K ≤ N+1 is the necessary and sufficient condition for the preservation of noise-free step edges, and both K ≤ N+1 and K ≤ I are the necessary and sufficient conditions for the preservation of a noise-free narrow pulse of duration I; note that such a narrow pulse can generally be written as

$$x_k = \begin{cases} 0 & , & k < j \\ H_1 & & j \le k < j+I \\ H_2 & & j + I \le k \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

where j is an integer and $H_1 \ne 0$, $H_2 \ne H_1$. Thus a large window size can be chosen without distorting

narrow pulses, although the degree of non-impulsive noise suppression is not changed by increasing window size for a fixed K. In the two-dimensional case the conditions K ≤ N+1 and K ≤ I have to be modified, depending on the shapes of the window, the narrow pulses and edges. For instance, when a symmetric square window of size 2N+1 is used, horizontal or vertical edges will be preserved by choosing K ≤ $\sqrt{2N+1}$ ($\sqrt{2N+1}$+1)/2. Concerning the preservation of two-dimensional narrow pulses, a statement similar to the one mentioned at the end of the previous section can be made; a narrow pulse composed of I pixels will be preserved by K-NN filtering with K ≤ I if all of the pixels in the narrow pulse are included in the window whenever the subject pixel is part of the narrow pulse.

We should note that in [4,5] a filter has been defined (which we will describe as the K-NN$_2$ filter) in which the subject pixel is _excluded_ from the averaging. In other words, the window W does not include the subject pixel. Use of this type of window for the K-NN filter may have an advantage in that the filter can suppress isolated impulsive noise components. However, for both K-NN filters impulsive noise suppression can be achieved by repeated filtering.

The α-TM filter averages a _fixed_ number of values _symmetrically_ in a neighborhood of the median, and is a direct extension of a median filter. The K-NN filter averages a _fixed_ number of values in a neighborhood of the subject pixel, which results in _non-symmetric_ treatment of the ordered data, and may be viewed as an extension of an identity filter. This comparison brings up the possibility of a _symmetric_ K-NN filter averaging a _fixed_ number of values as a direct extension of the identity filter and a counterpart of the α-TM extension of the median filter. For instance, in the one-dimensional case, when the subject pixel is x_k a symmetric K-NN$_1$ filter may be defined to select (K-1)/2 samples from each of the sets $\{x_i | k-N \le i < k\}$ and $\{x_i | k < i \le k+N\}$, for an odd K. However, this extension of the identity filter can be expected to neither preserve edges well nor suppress impulsive noise components and will not be considered further. On the other hand, one can also think of a _non-symmetric_ α-TM filter which averages a _fixed_ number of values in a neighborhood of the median as in α-TM filtering, but with possibly a different number of values selected from either side of the median. This leads to a filter which averages K pixels whose gray levels are closest to the _median_ amongst the gray levels in any window; we will refer to it as the _median K-NN filter_. The window sizes of the median K-NN filter are restricted as in median filtering, while K is chosen as in K-NN filtering.

MTM filtering, in which a _variable_ number of values are averaged _non-symmetrically_ in a neighborhood of the median, can be thought of as a modification of median K-NN$_1$ filters. The K-NN filters can be modified to average a _variable_ number of samples _non-symmetrically_ in the same way that the median K-NN$_1$ filter can be modified to give the MTM filter. This leads us to filters which will be called the _modified nearest neighbor filters_ (MNN filters). The MNN filters average

values lying within some interval $[x_k-q, x_k+q]$ amongst the values in their window, where x_k is the gray level of the subject pixel.

The MNN_1 filter cannot suppress impulsive noise components effectively even with iterated use because it averages values close to the subject pixel value in any window; however, it can smooth non-impulsive noise without blurring. The behavior of the MNN_1 filter varies from that of the identity filter (no filtering) when the subject pixel has been corrupted by an impulsive noise to that of the running mean filter when the subject pixel is located in a slowly varying portion of the image, for a properly chosen q.

We have noted, in Section II, that a DW MTM filter allows one to achieve more smoothing without severe loss of narrow pulses in an image. Increasing the window size of an MTM filter directly does not allow this advantage to be obtained. In MNN_1 filtering, increasing the window size does allow more smoothing without loss of narrow pulses for a properly chosen q; of course, MNN_1 filtering does not give impulsive noise rejection. For instance, the one-dimensional noise-free narrow pulse of (1) will be preserved for any window size as long as

$$q < \min \{H_1, H_2, |H_1-H_2|\}. \qquad (2)$$

If only

$$q < \min \{H_1, H_2\} \qquad (3)$$

holds the pulse is also preserved, as long as the window size is not larger than $2I+1$. Note that the DW MTM filter also preserves the pulse (1), as long as the condition (2) holds and the small window size is not larger than $2I-1$, for arbitrarily large window size. If only (3) holds than the pulse (1) is also preserved in DW MTM filtering if the large window size is no larger than $2I+1$

It is interesting to note that the MTM and MNN_1 filters can be represented as a weighted average of the form

$$y_{k,\ell} = \frac{\sum\sum_W a_{r,s} x_{k+r,\ell+s}}{\sum\sum_W a_{r,s}} \qquad (4)$$

When

$$a_{r,s} = \begin{cases} 1, & |x_{k+r, \ell+s} - m_{k,\ell}| \le q \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \qquad (5)$$

we get the MTM filter. The MNN_1 filter is obtained by replacing $m_{k,\ell}$ in (5) with $x_{k,\ell}$. The DW MTM filter can also be obtained by using the large window as W in (4) and by using $m_{k,\ell}$ from the small window in (5).

III. EXPERIMENTS

In this section we give some results of the application of the above nonlinear filters in image processing. The original image under consideration consisted of 100 x 100 pixel values with eight bits of resolution per pixel. It was a geometric image of flat portions with gray levels

either 100 or 150, and a sinusoidal part whose maximum amplitude was 150 and minimum amplitude was 100. The height of edges was 50 except for the lower diagonal one (see photographs on the next page) whose height was 35. Each cross-shaped narrow pulse was composed of 12 pixels having a constant gray level of 150. Two types of noise were added to the original image: zero-mean white Gaussian noise with standard deviation 10 and 100 impulses which occurred at random positions, with gray levels 250. The filters discussed so far, with a 3 x 3 square window, were applied to the noisy image and this application was iterated three times. (The notation 3I in the photographs stands for "3 iterations"). In DW MTM filtering 3 x 3 and 7 x 7 square windows were used. The MNN_1 filter was also used with a 7 x 7 square window on 3 x 3 square-window median filtered data. The parameter K for the $K-NN_1$ and median $K-NN_1$ filter was chose to be 6 and the parameter q for the MTM, DW MTM and MNN_1 filters was chosen to be 30 (i.e. $q=H-2\sigma$, except for the lower diagonal edge).

The MTM filter after three iterations is seen to be better in noise suppression than the iterated median, median $K-NN_1$ and $K-NN_1$ filters, which give a more mottled appearance. The results of the DW MTM filter and the median filter followed by the MNN_1 filter are seen to be quite similar and better than all the other results.

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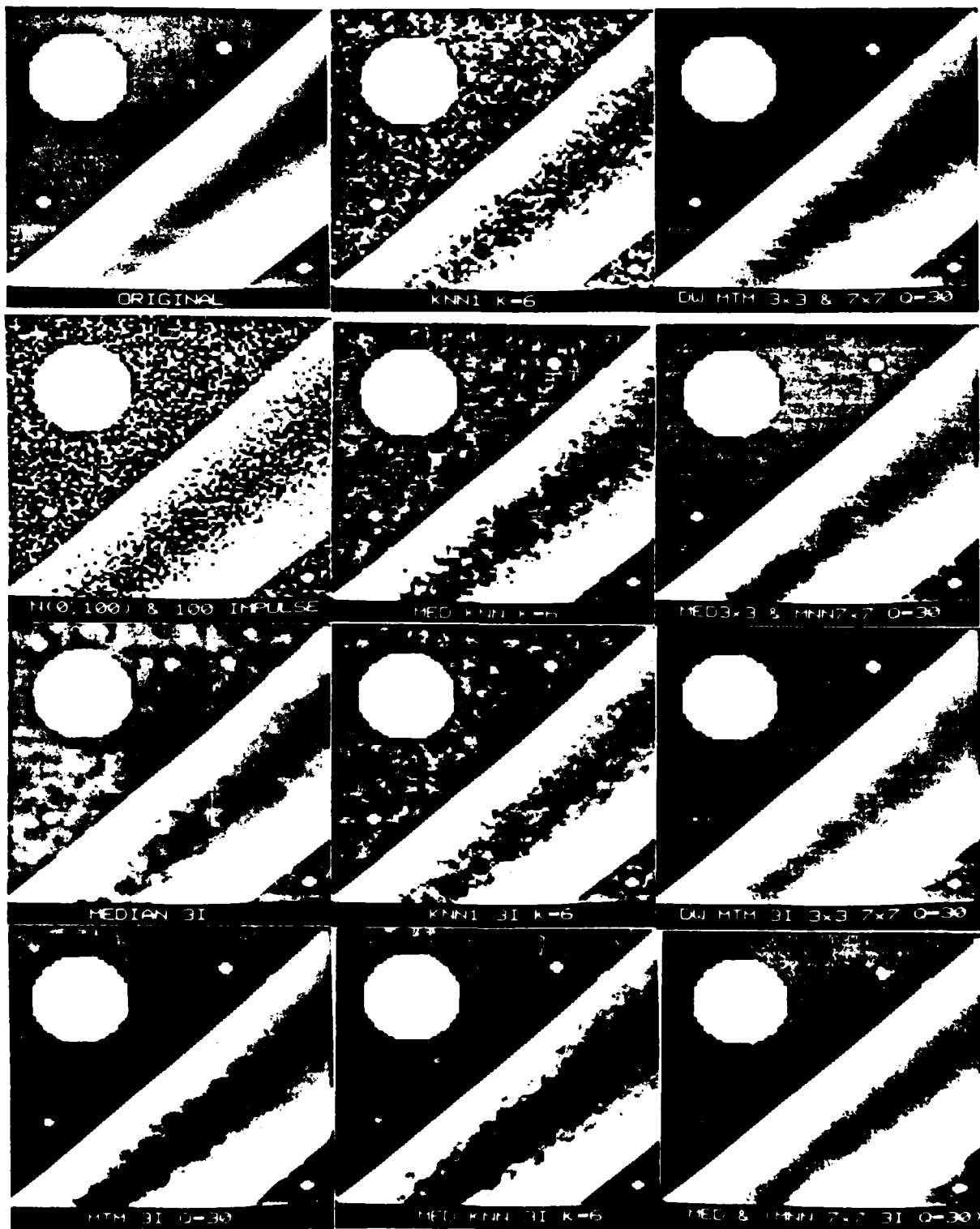
ORIGINAL | KNN1 K=6 | DW MTM 3×3 & 7×7 0-30
N(0,100) & 100 IMPULSE | MED KNN1 K=6 | MED3×3 & MNN7×7 0-30
MEDIAN 3I | KNN1 3I K=6 | DW MTM 3I 3×3 7×7 0-30
MTM 3I 0-30 | MED KNN 3I K=6 | MED & KMNN 7×7 3I 0-30

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